

PSYCHIATRY

Strain of Machine Age Life Causes Increase in Mental Ills

Manner of Actions is Better Key to Condition of Mind Than What One Actually Does and Says, Psychiatrist Holds

THE SLIGHT difference between the sane and the insane, the danger of fears due to ignorance or misunderstanding, man's efforts to continue to exist by adapting himself to his environment, and the effect of the strenuous modern life on man's nervous and mental organization were described by Dr. Nolan D. C. Lewis, director of clinical psychiatry at St. Elizabeth Hospital, at Washington, D. C. in a radio talk presented under the auspices of Science Service over the Columbia Broadcasting System.

"In these times of shifting values, heavy financial losses, forced struggles for vital existence and increasing competitive activity, including disconcerting noises from all kinds of machinery, the result of the so-called 'machine age,' the nervous and mental organization of the human being is called upon to carry an unusually heavy environmental load, a burden, which at any time may strain the individual to and beyond his capacity to stand the situation in which he finds himself," said Dr. Lewis. "The actual danger to mental health inherent in such situations, while an important factor, is perhaps no greater than the devastating fears and apprehensions engendered and enhanced in those, who under the additional stress, are developing pernicious habits of self-scrutiny, which tend to overrate the significance of simple mental fatigue or to misinterpret curious or slightly abnormal mental traits as signs of an unsound heredity or of a pending disturbance of mental integrity.

Mental Health and Disorder

"Until comparatively recent times in terms of history, the idea that mental disorder was a state entirely different from mental health was universal among physicians, as well as among people in general," he pointed out. "But it has been gradually discovered that the so-called abnormal mental manifestations are quite analogous to the normal mental processes, the difference being

principally a matter of degree. This is true also of the other aspects of the body; whether one be healthy or sick, the breathing, circulation, digestion and all other vital activities are controlled by the same chemical, physical and psychological laws of nature. In illness the conditions under which these laws function have become changed, thus making it possible for the same causes to produce different results. There is no very sharp dividing line between health and disease, excepting in those instances where from acute poisoning or infections, conditions have changed abruptly. Where the changes in conditions are sudden, the contrast is recognized by everyone.

Gradual Change

"In mental conditions the change from health to disorder may be so gradual that at times even the experienced physician is unable to tell with certainty the extent of the trouble. Often there are intermediary stages in the transition for which there is no gage to distinguish the healthy from the sick. There are no two individuals who are completely in accord as far as their constitutions, intellect and emotional equipment are concerned, so what is called "normal" can be little more than a notion which changes from time to time to suit the concept of averages. As far as the mind

is concerned, there are many intermediary grades or borderline states which must never be judged from single individual symptoms."

After describing some of the ways in which normal and abnormal minds differ, Dr. Lewis concluded as follows:

"For the present there is a good slogan to keep in mind concerning mental states: 'It is not so much what a person says and does, but it is the manner in which he says and does it.'"

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CHEMISTRY

Nicotine Less Poisonous After Ultraviolet Irradiation

NICOTINE is made less poisonous by exposure to ultraviolet radiation. But the raying must be done just right. An overdose of ultraviolet will make it poisonous again.

This is, in condensed summary, the outcome of an investigation made by Prof. Glen Wakeham, Genevieve Wilbur and Clarence B. Johnston of the University of Colorado. Their research, of course, has no bearing on the advertised claims of certain cigarette brands, because the material used was pure nicotine, and not tobacco or cigarettes.

Prof. Wakeham and his associates put pure nicotine into quartz tubes, and exposed it to the action of ultraviolet radiation from an electric arc. Then they tested its poisonous effect on rats. They found that nicotine rayed for from one to four minutes, at a distance of 12 centimeters (4¾ inches) from the arc, lost fifty per cent. of its toxicity. But nicotine left too long under the ultraviolet became fully poisonous again.

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